NEWS RELEASE

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Nebraska Has High Levels of Radon in Homes

January is National Radon Action Month

Lincoln—Radon testing in Nebraska continues to indicate that a high level of radon gas in homes in the state is common. Of over 48,000 homes tested since 1990, 59 percent have been above the acceptable health level set by the Environmental Protection Agency, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Radon is a colorless, odorless, naturally occurring gas that originates in the soil and can build to dangerous levels in homes. Since it is radioactive, it's very damaging to lung tissue when people breathe it in. EPA estimates that approximately 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year are due to radon exposure.

The EPA-set health standard for radon is 4 picocuries per liter of air, although exposure to even lower levels can raise a person's risk.

A recent analysis of radon data shows:

- As more homes in Nebraska are tested for radon, the state average is creeping higher, up to 6.3 picocuries per liter from 5.9 picocuries per liter in 2010.
- The average radon level in some counties has increased to above 4.0 picocuries per liter, with Sheridan, Garden, and Holt counties joining the 69 counties that tested that high previously.
- Dawson and Gage counties have joined Cedar County in the category of having an extremely high level. These counties have results in the 205 – 290 picocuries per liter category.

"The data supports what we've known for some time," said Sara Morgan, Indoor Air Quality Program Manager. "Nebraska homes are very likely to have high levels of radon."

"People should reduce their risk as much as possible," said Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer. "Radon testing is the first step to knowing how much risk you and your family are exposed to in your home. If you have a high level, you can take measures to reduce it."

Sealing obvious cracks and openings in the foundation of the home can slow radon entry, as can pressurizing the basement by opening air registers. However, since these steps will only lower the radon level slightly, contacting a licensed contractor will be the next step for most homes with higher levels. The contractor can install a permanent mitigation system which will actively pull the radon from under the foundation slab and exhaust it above the roof.

On the Nebraska Radon Program website, new maps show radon averages across the state, as well as how many homes have been tested, and the percentage of homes that test high.

"The maps are not a predictor of what radon level an individual home will have," Morgan said. "Even counties with low averages have some homes with high radon levels. Likewise, some high average counties have homes with low radon levels. Your neighbor's radon level is not an indication of what your radon level will be, so each homeowner needs to test."

To see the new summary data and maps showing areas in the state with high radon levels, visit http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/radon . This page will also have information on how to get a radon test kit and a list of contractors who are licensed to mitigate radon levels in homes.

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